



**Meeting Minutes
September 12, 2024**

The following Commission members were present:

Randy Boyd, President, University of Tennessee
Dr. Keith Carver, Senior Vice Chancellor and Senior Vice President, UT Institute of Agriculture
Dr. Donde Plowman, Chancellor, UT Knoxville
Jim Bledsoe, Tennessee Poultry Association
Phyllis Ferguson, Tennessee Pork Producers Association
Charles Goan, Chair, UTIA Eastern Region Advisory Council
Joe Huffine, Chair, UTIA Middle Region Advisory Council
John Charles Wilson, Chair, UTIA West Region Advisory Council
Stefan Maupin, Executive Director, Tennessee Soybean Promotion Board
Eric Mayberry, President, Tennessee Farm Bureau
Sen. Steve Southerland, Chairman, Senate Committee on Energy, Agriculture and Natural Resources
Rep. Chris Todd, Chairman, House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources
Jeff Aiken, Deputy Commissioner, TN Department of Agriculture (on behalf of Commissioner Charlie Hatcher)

President Randy Boyd welcomed attendees and emphasized the strong support and critical role of agriculture in Tennessee. Boyd celebrated the momentum at UTIA, citing the Agriculture & Natural Resources building dedication to be held September 13, 2024. Boyd highlighted the improving affordability of the UT System for Tennesseans – noting that 47% of UT students do not have debt, a 12% improvement since 2018. Boyd cited measures such as the UT Promise, continued strong state investment, and keeping tuition low as important to this effort.

Boyd also recognized the strong performance of research systemwide, where over \$452M in research and development expenditures are generated annually. He praised UT AgResearch which achieved a record year in 2023, with a 228% increase in competitive awards. Boyd also showcased the strong partnership with Tennessee State University, noting that over the past 5 years, UT and TSU have collaborated on \$40M of funded research and another \$60M are proposed or currently pending funding.

Boyd reiterated the importance of the Commission as a way for UT to stay connected at the highest levels to the challenges UT's agricultural partners face.

UT Knoxville Chancellor Donde Plowman provided updates highlighting continued enrollment growth at UT Knoxville, which has increased by nearly 7%, and cited increasing applications to both the Herbert College of Agriculture and the Veterinary College. Freshman-to-sophomore retention rate stands at 91.9%, a key indicator of graduation success. Plowman also discussed strengthening the partnership with Oak Ridge National Laboratory (ORNL), noting that the UT Oak Ridge Innovation Institute has partnered with UTIA faculty on one of their four convergent research initiatives.

Senior Vice Chancellor and Senior Vice President Keith Carver led a discussion for commission feedback and provided an update on the UTIA Strategic Plan *Growing Greatness*. In his presentation, he noted the strong alignment of leadership in Tennessee through President Boyd, Chancellor Plowman, and Commissioner Hatcher. He also noted several themes that came through the strategic plan process, including expanding educational opportunities, fostering innovation and discovery, encouraging and increasing collaboration, sharing collective success and increasing communication efforts with stakeholders, and nurturing talent development. More information on the strategic plan is available at <https://utia.tennessee.edu/strategic-plan/>.

Carver also updated the Commission on executive searches underway, including deans for the Herbert College of Agriculture and UT Extension. Carver also provided an update on the status of the Protein Innovation Center (Meats Lab), which is scheduled for completion in October 2026.

Interim Dean of the Herbert College of Agriculture Dave White delivered an update on UTIA's Enrollment and Workforce Development Study. Highlights from the Hanover study included:

- Reevaluation of underperforming programs to better market and add concentrations that will appeal to more students
- Examples of possible future agriculture majors shared included:
 - **Environmental Sciences:** Expansion of programs in environmental sciences and animal sciences.
 - **Sustainable Agriculture & Emerging Fields:** Possible development of programs in agroecology, fermentation science, and bioinformatics.
 - **New Degree Programs:** Exploring outdoor recreation and management, agricultural environmental policy (in collaboration with the Baker School), and precision agriculture.

Commission members voiced support of the need to review and possibly rebrand certain programs to increase relevance and stressed alignment with needs of industry as decisions are implemented.

The Commission discussed the continued challenges in Tennessee associated with farmland loss and land development. Concerns were raised regarding the loss of farmland due to increasing urban expansion and rising land values driven by development. Feedback was given around the need to develop new tools to help farmers save for retirement, the need for new economic development tools to benefit the agriculture community, and the need for better local planning services in Tennessee. Precision agriculture was raised as a critical way to support farmers during a time of rapid land loss, by making farmers more efficient and profitable with their existing land. Commission member Phyllis Ferguson made a motion that the Commission adopt a resolution in support of UTIA's precision agriculture funding request to the state. The motion was unanimously approved, and a copy of the resolution is attached.

UT Martin Provost Phil Cavalier and UTM Agriculture and Applied Sciences Dean Todd Winters provided an update to the Commission about the UT Martin strategic plan underway, record enrollment success, and the continued successful partnerships UT Martin is leading with Tennessee Colleges of Applied Technology and community colleges. Dean Winters informed the Commission that UTM is transforming its animal science concentration into a new major and is considering several new programs.

With no further business, the Committee adjourned.